The Christian's Invisible Enemy

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."
—I Peter 5:8,9

Is there a personal Devil, an enemy of God and of man? If so, who created him, and why does an all-powerful God of righteousness and love permit such a being to exist? Throughout the ages these questions have been pondered by sincere and thoughtful people. Many answers have been given. On the one hand, there is the view that the Devil is a hideous looking creature with cloven hoofs and a spiked tail whose chief business is to preside over the alleged torture of the unsaved dead. On the other hand, the claim is made that the Devil of the Bible is merely an evil principle, widespread and powerful in its opposition to God and to righteousness, but not a personality.

The Scriptures teach that there is a personal Devil, that he is of a higher order of creation than

man, and invisible to man. This powerful being was created perfect. God, through the Prophet Isaiah, refers to him as "Lucifer, son of the morning." (Isa. 14:12) He fell from his perfection and from his loyalty to the Creator when pride and ambition developed in his heart. Isaiah wrote further concerning him: "Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High."—vss. 13,14

Various names and titles are given to this fallen Lucifer in the Bible. He is referred to as "that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan." (Rev. 20:2) In John 12:31 he is described as "the prince of this world," and he is also thus depicted in John 14:30 and 16:11. In Ephesians 2:2 Satan is described as "the prince of the power of the air," and in II Corinthians 4:4 as "the god of this world." Our opening text refers to him as "your adversary the devil."

Through the various references given to us in the Bible concerning him we are able to gain a fairly comprehensive understanding of his many methods of attack against God's people. The first activity of Satan described in the Bible is recorded in Genesis 3:1-5. This is the account of the manner in which he deceived mother Eve. He asked Eve, "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" She answered, "Of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, … lest ye die." However, Satan's reply was: "Ye shall not surely die."

God's Word Attacked

Here was an assault on the integrity of God's Word. This has been one of Satan's methods of attack against God and his people throughout the ages. In this first instance Eve was deceived, although Adam was not, yet he also sinned. (I Tim. 2:14) Since that time many have been deceived by Satan's lies, while a few in every age have remained steadfastly loyal to the Word of God. The importance of this on the part of God's people is emphasized in Isaiah 8:20, which reads: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, … there is no light in them."

It was not until the giving of the Law to the Israelites at Mount Sinai that the Word of God began to be made available in written form. Aside from this, however, in ancient times God spoke to his people largely through one or another of his holy angels. This continued until the First Advent of Jesus, when an angel announced his birth and declared it to be glad tidings of great joy to all people. (Luke 2:10,11) Meanwhile, the prophetic writings prior to Jesus' earthly ministry were added to the books of the Law. These inspired writings became a part of the written Word of God, that part which we now refer to as the Old Testament.

Throughout these "books" of the Old Testament rings the harmonious theme song of the Bible. This theme centers around the great kingdom plan of God to redeem and restore mankind to life—the life that was forfeited and "lost" when our first parents disobeyed divine law in the Garden of Eden. (Luke 19:10) In this melody of divine love there is presented the hope of a coming Messiah,

the Christ. It was this Christ whose birth was announced by the angel. By his birth, the plan of God had taken a step forward in development.

The New Testament Born

Without much delay the teachings of Jesus were recorded in the four Gospels. In due time there came also the historical book of Acts and the epistles of Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John, as well as the book of Revelation. Thus, the New Testament was added to the Old Testament to give us the complete Word of God. It is this vast storehouse of Truth that our Heavenly Father has used throughout the present age since Pentecost to nourish and strengthen his people as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. (II Cor. 5:17) How wonderfully the precious realities of God's plan refresh us as day by day we feed upon them.

Satan has always been on the alert to disparage the Word of God and to render it ineffective in the hearts and lives of those who receive it. A reference is made to one aspect of this effort in the Parable of the Sower, in which we are told that the seed sown is "the word of God." This refers not only to the Bible, but also to the glorious Gospel message of "the word of the kingdom" that is the main theme of the Bible. Concerning the seed sown by the wayside, we read, "Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."—Luke 8:11,12; Matt. 13:19

Here we find the Devil endeavoring to prevent the Word of God from taking root in the lives of people. Perhaps many of us have wondered why it is that so often, when we see someone beginning to

take a keen interest in the beauties of God's Word, that interest so quickly wanes. Jesus has given us the answer. In the case of Eve, Satan insisted that God's Word was not true, and now in the parable we see him snatching the Word from the hearts of the newly interested.

The Larger Picture

Satan, however, was not satisfied with the harm he could do by taking away the Word of God from the hearts of individuals who might be getting interested in it. As time went on, a much more ambitious scheme unfolded. Paul foretold that there would come a great "falling away" [Greek: defection] from the faith, and this started soon after the apostles died. (II Thess. 2:3) The "most holy faith" of the Scriptures was kept during the time of the apostles by their encouragement to adhere strictly to the Word of God. (Jude 1:20) Paul complimented the Bereans because they "searched the scriptures daily" to see if what he was telling them was true. (Acts 17:11) The insistence on scriptural support for every item of teaching was one of the basic safeguards of the Early Church.

Following the death of the apostles this situation began to change. The Bible was available then only in manuscript form, and copies were scarce. Many of the believers would have to depend on the knowledge that a few favored ones who possessed the Bible could impart to them. The idea soon developed that loyalty to the Word of God really meant loyalty to someone else's understanding of its teachings. This natural consequence of circumstances was quickly taken advantage of by Satan. As time

went on the tradition developed that while the Bible was the supreme authority, it could be interpreted properly only by the church and its leaders. This viewpoint is widely held even to this day.

Satan undoubtedly had much to do with this subtle setting aside of the real authority of the Scriptures over the beliefs and lives of God's professed people. The result was that human traditions and superstitions began slowly to replace the beautiful and inspiring teachings of the Bible. The Bible declares that "the wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23) However, the church-appointed interpreters of the Bible said, "No; the wages of sin is eternal torment." The Bible says there is "one God." (I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6; I Tim. 2:5) Yet, many Bible interpreters declared that there are three gods, and these three are one.

The Bible teaches that the future judgment "day" of the world will be "a thousand years" of blessed opportunity to accept Christ, to obey the laws of the Millennial kingdom and live forever. (Acts 17:31; II Pet. 3:8; Rev. 20:4,6) Some interpreters of the Bible say that the judgment day will be one of doom, that it will be twenty-four hours in length, and all who have died in unbelief will be consigned to a place of eternal torture in a fiery hell.

We could go on and discover that essentially every precious doctrine of God's plan became distorted by interpreters of the Bible. Yet it was so subtly accomplished that the majority supposed they were in harmony with the Scriptures. This did not matter to Satan, since his ruse had plucked from the hearts of professed Christians the glorious kingdom hope set forth in the inspired Word of God.

The Messianic Kingdom

The clear and unmistakable teachings of the Bible are that the promised kingdom of the Messiah would not be established until after his return at his Second Advent. (Luke 17:20; 19:11,12,15; II Thess. 2:1-3) Satan went to work on this scriptural teaching also. Playing upon the ambitions of the human heart, he succeeded in getting many believers to accept the notion that the kingdom of Christ did not have to wait for Christ's return, but was set up and functioning through a powerful church-state system that lasted for centuries.

Satan had tried something similar to this in one of his temptations of Jesus. He told the Master that if he would fall down and worship him, he would give him all the kingdoms of this world. Jesus met this temptation in the proper manner, quoting a Scripture: "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."—Matt. 4:8-10; Exod. 20:1-5; Deut. 6:13,14

While Satan failed with Jesus, he succeeded later with many of Jesus' professed followers. They saw the glamour of power and authority among men and sensed the lure of high-sounding titles. They gave up waiting for Christ to return to establish his kingdom and undertook to do it themselves. That which they reared up in their grasp for power they called "Christendom"—Christ's kingdom.

The fact that in this Christendom arrangement there was almost continuous war, persecution, and evil of every kind—all so contrary to the joyful conditions of Christ's true kingdom as presented to us in the Word of God—seemed to count for little or nothing in their claims to kingdom authority. They

chose to ignore the facts. While there were no real evidences of Christ's true kingdom having been established, they continued to be guided by the false interpretations of the Bible by which they were being deceived.

Kingdom Hope Lost

The substitution of Christendom for the true Messianic kingdom, in addition to reflecting a disregard for the teachings of the Word of God, also took away the hope of God's professed people for the real kingdom of promise. Once the church-state systems were established, the preaching of the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment at that time of the kingdom of promise almost entirely ceased. Thus, with this one master stroke Satan snatched from the hearts of most believers the great kingdom theme of the Scriptures. He did it by substituting misinterpretations of the Bible for the Bible itself.

The Bible teaches that the followers of the Master should look to each other for mutual help in their study of the Word. (I Thess. 4:18; 5:11) It would be a mistake to suppose that we, by deliberately isolating ourselves from others, could expect the Lord to specially guide us in the understanding of his Word. God has placed various servants, not to be considered "lords," in his church such as pastors, teachers, evangelists, and elders. (Eph. 4:11,12; I Pet. 5:1-3) He expects all of us to help one another as much as we can. However, in following this arrangement we should keep in mind that the Bible itself is the final word of authority. Even reasonable conclusions should be rejected

unless they are in harmony with the plain statements of the inspired Word of God.

Discouragement

Another method used by Satan to oppose God's people is discouragement. In II Corinthians 12:7-10 Paul speaks of one of his infirmities—often regarded as his poor eyesight—and says that it was a "messenger of Satan to buffet" him. Whether this infirmity was poor eyesight or something else, the important thing was Paul's recognition of the manner in which Satan was making use of it in an attempt to discourage him. Paul asked the Lord three times to remove this "thorn in the flesh," but the Lord replied, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Satan did not succeed in discouraging Paul, who testified, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasures in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

Our theme text is related to this method of attack. The Devil, Peter says, goes about as a "roaring lion" seeking whom he may devour. The apostle says that we should resist this by being "stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." The lesson here seems clear. All of the Lord's people have afflictions of one sort or another, just as the world does—illnesses, deaths in the family, economic reverses, misunderstandings, and other burdens. Satan often endeavors to have us believe

that if we were truly the Lord's people, God would take care of us and prevent these situations from coming about. The Adversary tries to instill fear that perhaps we have been unfaithful, and because of this the Lord has withdrawn his favor from us.

Our defenses against this sort of attack are the many scriptures that reveal that the followers of the Master are a sacrificing and suffering people. There is no assurance that the Lord will protect us from the trials and difficulties that are experienced by mankind in general. Our attitude in these situations should be to cast all our care upon the Lord knowing that he cares for us, not according to the flesh, but as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.—Rom. 12:1; I Pet. 4:12,13; 5:7; I Cor. 10:13, *New English Translation*

Pride

James wrote, "Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:5-7) Here James indicates that one of Satan's methods of attack is to engender pride and ambition in the hearts of the Lord's people. We are to resist this urge by humbling ourselves "under the mighty hand of God," knowing that our promised exaltation will come "in due time." (I Pet. 5:6) Genuine promotion that is in harmony with the divine will comes from God and is not self-planned.—Ps. 75:5-7

We could properly say that Satan is directly or indirectly associated with all influences that tend

to divert the Lord's people from their course of true faithfulness in serving the divine cause. We often speak of our enemies as being the world, the flesh, and the Devil, but it seems evident that Satan is at the head of this list. It is he who works to our spiritual disadvantage through the world and through our fallen flesh. How important it is therefore that we keep alert to detect his every approach. We should be prepared to resist him through a sincere use of the Word of God, through prayer, and by wearing all of the spiritual armor that has been provided to us.—Eph. 6:10-18

Enmity

Shortly after the fall of our first parents, God said to Satan: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Gen. 3:15) Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees of his day, "Ye are of your father the devil." (John 8:44) Here, at least, was a part of the serpent's "seed." The seed of the woman is Christ and his footstep followers. (Gal. 3:16,27-29) The foretold enmity of the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman was manifested in the bitter persecution inflicted upon Jesus by the religious rulers of his day. This enmity has continued against his followers with varying degrees of intensity ever since.—John 15:20; II Tim. 3:12

However, we know that through it all, Christ, the seed of promise, will be victorious. We are not ignorant of Satan's devices. (II Cor. 2:11) We know that if we follow the Lord's instructions in our "good fight of faith" and rely always on him to guide and

strengthen us, we will neither be overcome nor foiled by the wiles of the Devil. (I Tim. 6:12) We have the promise of ultimate victory, for Paul wrote, "The God of peace shall bruise [Greek: crush completely] Satan under your feet shortly."—Rom. 16:20

This will be the promised bruising of the head of the serpent. The word "shortly" here used by Paul is an interesting one. He used it nearly two thousand years ago, and the serpent's head has not yet been crushed. He is still going about "as a roaring lion, … seeking whom he may devour." He and his ministers are still "transformed [Greek: disguised] into an angel of light" and "ministers of righteousness" to deceive and mislead. To resist them we still need to hold firmly to all the great fundamental teachings of the divine plan of the ages, as found in the Bible.—I Pet. 5:8; II Cor. 11:14,15; II Tim. 3:16,17, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

We have the plain and understandable teachings of the "gospel of Christ," which is the "power of God unto salvation." (Rom. 1:16) Let us study these and bind them upon our hearts. (Prov. 7:1-3) Let us make sure that our understanding of the Scriptures is in harmony with the facts with which we are surrounded. Those in the Dark Ages who accepted the teaching that the union of church and state represented the established kingdom of Christ did not consider the facts. They did not consider that in the real kingdom of Christ wars and sickness of all kinds, as well as death, will be destroyed. (Isa. 25:6-9; Micah 4:1-4; Rev. 21:1-5) They did not consider the fact that the bitter persecution of fellow Christians was incompatible with God's portrait of the Messianic kingdom.

A faithful servant of the Lord admonished that we should not allow our expectations to weigh anything against the facts. This is indeed wholesome advice. We all want to see the Messianic kingdom in operation, but our desires alone will not make it so. The Scriptures are clear that if we want to be in that kingdom, living and reigning with Christ, we must continue to suffer with him faithfully even unto death. (Rev. 2:10) This is one of the great fundamentals of the plan of God. Let us be encouraged by it to remain in the narrow way of sacrifice until the end is reached in death. Thus will we be worthy by and by—and "shortly"—of bruising Satan under our feet, and together with Christ, of bringing eternal blessings to all the families and nations of the earth.—Gen. 22:18; 26:4; Acts 3:25 ■